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Our Man in the Kremlin

U.S. Got True Account Of U-2 Plane Incident

(Fifth in a Series)

By Frank Gibney

Col. Oleg Penkovski returned to Moscow on May 6, 1961, from his first visit to London and set about in earnest to gather more information for Western intelligence.

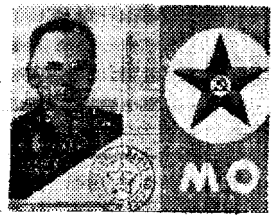
Some of this intelligence turned out to be the first accurate account of two troubling incidents on the Soviet-American policy frontiers—the downing of the U-2 reconnaissance plane in 1960 and the later Soviet attack on another American aircraft off the coast of Siberia.

When he returned to Moscow, he stored his new camera, film, radio receiver and frequency instructions in a secret drawer in the apartment which he and his family occupied on the Maxim Gorky Embankment. But he kept all knowledge of his new espionage role from them.

As far as Vera Penkovsky was concerned, her husband was busy at his normal confidential talks. Her own background as the daughter of a "political" general conditioned her against asking too many questions about his late hours or unexplained absences. The best Vera hoped for was another attache's assignment abroad, like their 1956 post in Turkey, where she could practice her French and enjoy the better clothes and companionship of a foreign society.

Greville Wynne flew back into Moscow on May 27, to resume business negotiations with Penkovsky's committee on behalf of the British firms he represented. Penkovsky met him with a car at Sheremetevo Airport. On the way into the city, "Alex," as Wynne called him, handed the Englishman a packet of some 20 exposed films and other documents, including his own reports, for delivery to British and American intelligence.

The same evening Penkovsky visited Wynne in his room at the Metropol Hotel. Taking care to keep their



conversation innocuous (the room of a foreign visitor like Wynne would probably be wired), Wynne gave Penkovsky a package containing 30 fresh rolls of film and further instructions from the Anglo-American intelligence team in London.

Far from suspecting anything strange in Penkovsky's meetings with Wynne, his superiors in Soviet Military Intelligence continued to think that he was "developing" a promising British contact. Penkovsky's work with the Soviet delegation in London was so highly regarded, in fact, that his pleased superiors arranged to send him there again in July, to attend the opening of a Soviet Industrial Exhibition. This time he was to travel alone, without any delegation. American and British intelligence could hardly have wished for such a nice arrangement.

One presumes that Western intelligence found intensely valuable not only Penkovsky's estimates of future Soviet plans, but his reconstruction of recent events in Soviet-American relations — most of which served only to underline his warnings about Khrushchev's new policy of aggression.

For Penkovsky the intelligence information he gave was only a means to an end. His real purpose was to alert the American and British people to the danger of Khrushchev's "adventurist" tactics.

By Frank Gibney

The American U-2 pilot Gary Powers was shot down on May 1, 1960. Prior to the Powers flight, other U-2 flights had been made over the Kiev and Kharkov, but Khrushchev kept his mouth shut, because at that time there were no missiles that could be effective at the altitudes where the U-2 aircraft were flying.

When Powers was shot down over Sverdlovsk it was not a direct hit but rather the shock wave that did it. The aircraft simply fell apart from it. During his descent Powers lost consciousness several times. He was unconscious when they picked him up from the ground; therefore, he was helpless to do anything and did not put up any resistance. On May 1 when this incident happened I was Duty Officer at GRU (Military Intelligence) headquarters. I was the first one to report it to the GRU officials.

At that moment, the KGB did not have an English interpreter. I was supposed to talk to him because I was the only one around who had some understanding of English—I had already reported the incident to some generals. If they had not found a KGB interpreter at the last minute, I would have been the first one to interview Powers.

Ultimately, they called up to say that I was not needed. It seems that the KGB (State Security) chief, this young fellow Shelepin, who used to run the Komsomol (he replaced Serov at the KGB), wanted to make the report to Khrushchev personally. So he got an interpreter and picked Powers up himself. But the military had knocked Powers down and Powers was considered to be a military prisoner. He should have been turned over to the General Staff. Nonetheless, the KGB seized him, took him to Dzerzhinskiy Square, and made their own report. He needed medical treatment, because he was still in shock.

New Rockets

Earlier, when a U-2 flight came over in the direction of Kiev-Kharkov, there had been nothing to shoot with. As soon as the new rockets appeared, Khrushchev gave the order to use them. So they fired at Powers on May 1, 1960. Of course, we had antiaircraft defenses before, but not in quantity, and they were not able to go into action so quickly.

Marshal Biryuzov, then commander-in-chief of missile forces, was reprimanded because he had not correctly estimated the probable direction of the U-2 flights—he misgauged the importance of the targets. His forces wanted to fire when the aircraft from Turkey flew over Kiev, but there was nothing to fire with and the aircraft escaped. Powers would have escaped if he had flown one or one and a half kilometers to the right of his flight path.

On May 5, after Powers was knocked down, Khrushchev ordered a suspension of (secret) agent operations to avoid the risk of being caught by a Western provocation or, possibly, of furnishing material for Western counterpropaganda. There were many protests about dropping scheduled meetings and other contacts, but it had to be done.

The resident in Pakistan decided on his own to pick up material from a dead drop which was already loaded, in order to avoid possible compromise to the agent. For this he was severely reprimanded by his superior at the GRU even though he did the right thing. Thus, despite the damage it did to the agent network, Khrushchev ordered cessation of agent contacts during the period when he was going to capitalize on the Powers incident.

Khrushchev Lied

Khrushchev followed Powers' investigation and trial with great interest. He personally conducted the propaganda activity connected with the case. He was the first who began to shout about the direct hit, although actually there had been no such thing. Khrushchev wanted to brag about his missiles.

Khrushchev lied when he says that Powers was shot down by the first missile fired. Actually, 14 missiles were fired at his plane. The shock wave produced by the bursts caused his plane to disintegrate. The examination of Powers' plane pro-

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THE SPY PLANE—Wreckage of the U-2 shot down over Russia in 1960 was displayed in Moscow.

duced no evidence of a direct hit; nor were there any missile fragments found on it. One of the 14 missiles fired at Powers' plane shot down a Soviet MIG-19 which went up to pursue Powers. Its pilot, a junior lieutenant, perished.

The U.S. aircraft RB-47 shot down on Khrushchev's order (in July, 1960) was not flying over Soviet territory; it was flying over neutral waters. Pinpointed by radar, it was shot down by Khrushchev's personal order. When the true facts were reported to Khrushchev, he said: "Well done, boys, keep them from even flying close."

Such is our way of observing international law. Yet Khrushchev was afraid to admit what had actually happened. Lies and deceit are all around us. There is no truth anywhere. I know for a fact that our military leaders had a note prepared with apologies for the incident, but Khrushchev said: "No, let them know that we are strong."